1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

CHAPTER VI

Demography and Familism

OF the demographic phenomena the small farmers present, the decline of population is most easily isolated. The facts are as follows: There has been a continuous and characteristic decline since the great famine of 1845. Numbers have fallen from 6,548,000 in 1841 to 2,963,000 in 1926. With the exception of Dublin, the whole of the country has suffered in this decline. On the whole, however, the country districts have suffered at a greater rate than have the towns. In 1841, 80 per cent of the population was rural; today only 63 per cent. In other words, since 1841 there has been an almost continuous increase in the town population at the expense of the rural, though the two have shared a common decline. Put in terms of percentages: since 1841, the country districts have lost 64 per cent of their population, towns from 200 to 500 49 per cent, towns from 5,000 to 10,000 25 per cent, and towns other than Dublin over 10,000 13 per cent. Dublin, on the other hand, has gained 47 per cent. That the enormous emigration associated with this decline is a matter of the contemporary generation is evident when it is recognized that 30 per cent of the native-born Irish were living in other countries in 1926.

The closest approach among European countries is the case of Norway, where 15 per cent live outside. Italy, which has provided so many citizens for the United States and the

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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Argentine, has only 4 per cent of its natives residing in foreign countries. Since 1911 there has, however, been a check in the decrease; only 5 per cent of the population was lost between 1911 and 1926. The region of our investigation, County Clare, shares in this general loss, falling in population from 250,000 in 1841 to 95,000 in 1926. Since 1911 it has lost only 8 per cent.

As the statistics show, this loss of population is in the main a problem of the country districts. The towns have gained proportionately to the countryside; though in a lesser degree, they have, of course, shared the common loss. Many causes for this decline have been operative and, as the excellent work by Dr. William Forbes Adams, *Ireland and Irish Emigration to the New World*,[1] shows, emigration is no new factor in Irish life. The great impetus for an enormous exodus of population was the famine of 1845, but since then emigration has flowed on continuously, coming to an end only in 1932 when for the first time for at least a century more Irishmen returned than left the country.

But far from the famine's having started the emigration from the present Free State, "the growth of emigration between 1815 and 1845," concludes Dr. Adams, "not only made possible the flight after the famine, it caused that flight. The thirty years before 1845 spread the emigrating spirit through all but the highest class until it became the favorite remedy for hard times. The tremendous rush of the next fifteen years could not have taken place without aid from the earlier emigrants." Since then, the land agitation, dissatisfaction with British rule, and periodic hard times have taken their toll, coupled with what Adams calls the greatest single cause of human migration, the work of powerful interests developed first in the early days of Irish emigration, "organizing and developing (immigrant) traffic for their own profit." The movement began long before

[1] New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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of a new set of component individuals into the relationships between land, goods, labor, and human beings.

In the light of this system and of the internal changes which are brought about within it, the Irish population statistics now may become interpretable. Late marriage and the high incidence of bachelorhood are associable with the reluctance of the old couple to renounce their leadership, the necessity of acquiring sufficient means to portion children, and the delay in dispersing the closed corporation of the family group until it is possible to establish the new one. The practical self-sufficiency of the family group makes it difficult to destroy. The identification of a single immediate family with the individual farm prevents the setting up of more than one new such group upon the land.

161 182 593

As we pointed out, subdivision of holdings practically ceased after 1852. Since then the struggle for land and legal reforms in land tenure have prohibited any great further division. The matchmaking system is very old in Ireland. The works of such Gaelic writers as Canon O'Leary describe it explicitly for the pre-famine period. With the cessation of subdivision of holdings came the necessity of providing for children elsewhere than on the land. From that same cessation of subdivision dates the high incidence of bachelorhood. In 1841, at the time of greatest population, age of marriage was normal. Then only 43 per cent of males between twenty-five and thirty-five were unmarried, not 72 per cent, as at present. Then only 15 per cent of males between thirty-five and forty-five were celibate, not 29 per cent as today. Figure 13 represents the percentages of unmarried males and females at each age in each subsequent census from 1841 to 1926.

Viewed in the light of this family structure, the decline of population becomes interpretable not as a flight from intolerable conditions, though economic distress had a powerful effect, not as a political gesture, though political

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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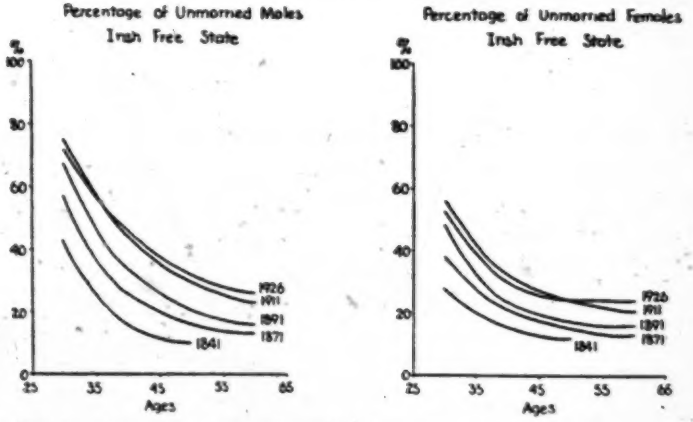
161 182 593 disturbance took its toll, but rather as a movement arising from the effect of all these causes upon a family system whose very nature predisposed it to disperse population and which could, therefore, accommodate itself to that dispersal when it occurred. Emigration, no new thing in 1845, ap-

FIGURE 13

PERCENTAGE OF UNMARRIED PERSONS, IRISH FREE STATE



The figures are taken from the censuses from 1841 to 1926.

pears as the logical corollary of this dispersal. It derives much of its character, such as assisted passages and remittances, from the social forces at work in the family. It can become a traditional movement like the movement from country to town without destroying the family structure or the rural culture whose members it takes away.

The authors do not mean to imply that anything within the social forces of the family as it exists in Ireland has had direct causal effect upon the peculiar statistics of Irish population. The authors would rather point out that the forces operative within that structure are of such a nature as to allow the society of which they are a part to continue to

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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function in essentially similar fashion through the welter of economic, political, and other events which have impinged upon the human beings who have successively filled the structure. Likewise, the structure is capable of continued and virile existence in the present, governing the lives of its component individuals and modifying itself to take in new influences.

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1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
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lands of the area made up of this parish and the contiguous parishes are the townlands from which marriages have moved brides outward. These same higher and more westerly townlands are also the ones that have lost population fastest and have been marked by the highest rates of celibacy. Since 1860, at least, families of this area have consistently paid higher dowries to establish their girls on better lands nearer urban and shopping centers. These families have married their daughters along the country roads downward and eastward, from the higher, poorer, more westwardly townlands to the better lands in lower and more eastwardly ones. Relatively speaking, there has been no movement of brides in a reverse direction. By comparison with the better lands, the poorer farms have done without brides for their young men. These poorer farms are the ones, then, who have seen their families "die out of it."

This is merely the evidence from one small parish and its neighbors. But it is instructive that it corresponds with the picture for Ireland as a whole, as the marital statistics of the censuses reveal it. Late marriage, celibacy, the marked preponderance of males in the sex ratio, are all phenomena of the western and poorer farming districts of the country.

Neither the establishment of a peasant proprietorship in the years of agrarian reform since the Land War nor the remarkable growth of prosperity among the farmers since the nadir of famine times has had any success in reversing the long-persistent trend of population decline in the countryside. They have had no effect either, it seems, upon the demographic phenomena associated with that decline. Perhaps the reason for the persistence of the trend despite all changes lies in the considerations revealed by the study of the matter in one small parish, as we have just described them. The acquisition of better lands, the growth of a greater rural prosperity, and the opening up of new opportunities [illegible] hand in hand with a persistence

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

161 of social sentiments and forms of social organization shaped entirely within the familism of the small farmers. The new opportunities have appeared first and foremost as means for personal and group advancement within the existing social and familist order.

One could hazard that the census figures represent not an "economic problem" in the sense of a flight from poverty or a fight against its restrictions but the movement of a population seizing upon new opportunities and new prosperity without relinquishing at any point the already existing organization of their social sentiments and habits. In such a view the problems of population decline in Ireland are results not of poverty but of prosperity.

161 166 555 However that may be, there is a close parallel between the opening of opportunities for education and for rise into the professions, the ranks of business in the Irish towns, and government, all taking place since 1870, and the demography of the small farmer class. The children of the small farmers have flocked through the doors opened to them into every walk of Irish life. They continue to do so today. The towns and their occupations continue to grow and grow, but the countryside does not. The process is one by which the long delays in marriage, the restriction of children to the few who can be well provided for, and the fierce centering of family ambition in the occupational status of its members, more usually thought of as urban, petit-bourgeois phenomena, have spread outward in to the countryside and overtaken the small farmer on his farm. The mobility of a changing, democratized social order, capable of recruiting the ranks of one class from the children of another, has been combined with the fixity, the conservatism, and the rigidity of an ancient and still vital familism. It should be said that Ireland is not unique in this recombination of elements of social organization. She is unique in illustrating so well, in her special way, a social process universal in the countries of Western European civilization.

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

It has already been pointed out that the census figures available at the time of the fieldwork on which this book is based are those of the Irish census of 1926. Since that time some at least of the figures based on the succeeding decennial census, that of 1936, have become available. There are also a number of annual statistics which bear on the questions of Irish population. It is interesting to turn to these for the light they throw on subsequent development in the trends we have noted.

The release of the 1936 census figures in 1939 showed conclusively that the demographic trends that have marked Ireland since Famine times continue to persist. Neither the years of the establishment of the Free State up to 1932 nor the years of depression, economic war, and the experimental programs of the De Valera regime since then have affected the trends. Any of the charts prepared for the 1926 figures needs only to be extrapolated along the trend line a few points to show the situation of ten years later.

Stated briefly, these trends recapitulate and reëmphasize the points we have already made. Emigration continues to mark the life of the country, draining the countryside first into the towns and second overseas, now to Great Britain rather than across the oceans. Ireland continues to hold its record of possessing the highest percentage of unmarried men and women in the world. The population over sixty-five years of age continues to rise. The population of children continues to fall. Marriages continue to be fertile, by comparison with many other countries. But they still tend to become fewer and fewer, and the delay of marriage into middle life grows longer and longer. The ratio of females to males continues to fall, until in 1936 there were 975 males for every 935 females in Ireland, the lowest sex ratio in Europe and one of the lowest in the world.

These figures mark the continued existence of the familistic order we have discussed. They mark as well the continuance of its struggle to fit modern life. Perhaps a figure

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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582 in the report of the Registrar-General for 1938 gives the best illustration of the culmination of the trends that mark this struggle. In that year slightly over half of all women who married (and only a negligible number of them were not making first marriages) were between thirty-five and forty-five years of age. The problem of delay in marriages seems to be reaching some sort of climax.

161 178 It is interesting to speculate what that climax might be and what future trend of demography it may inaugurate. It is obvious that the conditions these figures point to, rooted as they are in the social order of the countryside and of the nation, are in any case beyond the reach of ordinary measures. They have marked, as we have seen, every Irish administration since Famine days, whether native or not. They are not matters of "poverty" within the reach of immediate economic policies. If "poverty" refers to hunger and an absolute low level of living, the concept does not apply at all. If it denotes rather relative standing within a community of certain values, it has some meaning. But such meaning waits for its understanding on a realization of the form of family and community these values express.

Yet the old cry about a flight from the land has arisen in Ireland once again. Until the outbreak of war in 1939, the population question, linked now with continuing unemployment in the towns and a shortage of labor in the agricultural districts, had become a football of politics once more. The new small local factories of the regime of industrialization now have their place in the controversy. The opposition in the *Dáil* are bitter against a program they believe subsidizes industry at home out of the farmer's pocket, yet leaves him unable to employ the hands his farm requires. The government finds itself in a quandary. To accept the opposition view would be to admit itself responsible for a condition far beyond its control. To put a stop to the program of industrialization would leave the incoming farm

1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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sons and daughters with nothing to do at home. It would mean to give up all hope of absorbing them at home. Yet to build the factories is to send into the country districts the very forces of urbanism, such as wage payment, individual recompense, and a job rather than a part in group life, which wean the farm boys and girls away from a familist self-subsistence. Still the farmer of the familist tradition continues to vote the government in and continues to support the factories he must subsidize. For only by some such provision of occupations at home can he provide well for his children, as he must, by ambition and tradition.

There are farmers and farmers in Ireland. The small farmer is by all marks of social life a different person from the "big fellow." It is to be remembered that it is the little fellow who works the familist economy. Only the big fellow normally hires hands. Yet as sons and daughters leave for the towns and the town continues to make inroads on farm life, hired hands must take the vacant places. The migrant children must find new occupations with good pay and a steady hire. The process is one of continuous change at all points in the social order we are tracing out.

These population figures continue to mark, not any single cause or "factor" in social life, but the gradual, generation-slow transformation of an ancient culture, using that word in the anthropological sense. Its central core of familism is offering strong resistance to slow assault. But it changes, and along with it there changes the structure of the community that has been built upon a familistic base. The next chapters deal with these rural communities at the points of transformation: the nonfarming occupations in the countryside and the farmers' markets.

7:Johnson K-4 (no date) 1958
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

season; and the end of transhumance made the working of the system more difficult. Similarly, the increase of population led to a remarkable growth in the size of many clachans, which often made life in them increasingly inconvenient. Squabbles over rights of way and other petty affairs were common, and there was a growing awareness that the old methods of farming were becoming unsatisfactory. The introduction of new crops and rotations gave the *coup de grâce* to the efficiency of the system; for they were difficult to integrate into it, and therefore agricultural improvement was retarded.

The impetus behind the changes, however, usually did not come from the farmers themselves but from their landlords. Indeed, it seems possible that peasant resistance to the destruction of rundale was a considerable factor in nineteenth-century opposition to landlordism.[33] Often landlords, intent on improving their estates, would put whole areas of land into the melting pot, consolidating holdings and sometimes evicting the surplus population. Frequently the new holdings were arranged up and down the slope of the land, an arrangement that has resulted in the characteristic striped appearance of much of the modern Irish landscape. Although long, narrow strips were probably not the best possible farm shape (Fig. 4), they represented a compromise between the traditional system of allocating each farmer a share of every quality of land and the landlords' demands for greater efficiency. At the same time the old clachan groups were broken up and new farmhouses were built, each within its own land. In such a way most of the better agricultural land was converted, but at the end of the nineteenth century various areas, particularly in the west of Ireland, still remained under the old system or some modification of it. This hard core has now been largely eliminated by government action. First the British government attempted a general improvement of living conditions in western Ireland by means of the Congested Districts Board, whose work included the reorganization of agricultural holdings (Fig. 5);[34] after 1922 and the establishment of the Irish Free State the task was taken over by the Irish Land Commission.[35]

In some areas, however, the disappearance of clachan settlement was part of a natural process in the late nineteenth century. The population of Ireland started to decrease after the Great Famine of the 1840's, and even in areas where there had been little rearrangement of holdings some clachans became

[33] See, for example, the Devon Commission Report [see footnote 11 above], Part 1, Appendix 14, p. 58.

[34] T. W. Freeman: The Congested Districts of Western Ireland, *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 33, 1943, pp. 1–14.

[35] On this aspect of the Land Commission's work see "The Consolidation of Fragmented Agricultural Holdings" (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Washington, 1950), Chapter 3, "Relief of Rural Congestion in Ireland."

7:Johnson K-4 (no date) 1958
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

uninhabited and in others only a single family remained. In these areas, too, partial consolidation was carried out by adding the fields of an emigrating farmer to those of some neighbor or relative who remained at home. The decrease in population had a more general influence as well: throughout Ireland it prevented former conditions from reasserting themselves. Everywhere there was diminished pressure on the land, and the growth of larger farms rather than renewed subdivision.

There are still gaps, then, in the story of Irish rural settlement. Until documentary and field evidence slowly yields the missing chapters, the past will remain a subject for speculation rather than for confident explanation. The rural systems of previous centuries are now disappearing, but the surviving remains may hold clues to former conditions, and their interpretation remains a continuing challenge.

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

than there are on farms over fifty. In fact, one could almost say 'the smaller the farm the greater number of persons it supports'. The plurality of Irish farmers support themselves upon farms averaging from fifteen to thirty acres in area. Almost eight of every ten persons working in agriculture live by small-farm production.

By our standards, a farm under thirty acres or even under fifty acres is very small. So it is regarded in Ireland. When I call the Irish countryman a small farmer, I am following standards the Irish use themselves. Yet, to deal with the life of the small farmers is to deal with that of the single largest group on the land.

Furthermore, that group is concentrated in the west and south of Ireland. Historical and economic currents have massed the population in the more rugged 'mountainy' regions of south and west. A county of the rich central plain, such as Meath, where large farms are most numerous, has a density of about fifty persons per square mile. But a poorer, mountainous county such as Mayo, where small farms are very numerous indeed, supports seventy-five persons per square mile or an almost 50 per cent greater density.

But do those who support themselves by small farms form a true category? Are they a group unto themselves, or are they a numeration meaningless for the student of human behaviour? Statistics have a way of revealing real categories in life, but they

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

(3). Vital Statistics (General and Economic).

161 (A.) *Population.*—The population of these islands, though still dense, is, like that of the rest of Ireland, steadily decreasing, though in this case the decline is of recent date compared with many other parts of the country.

161 Between the years 1851 and 1871 the population had increased from 1047 persons, occupying 196 houses, to 1262, and 251, respectively.
167 Some time after 1871, however, emigration began to take a sensible effect; and between that year and the census of 1891 there has been a loss in people of 20·99 per cent., and in houses of 11·55 per cent. That the decrease is entirely due to emigration is proved by the returns of births and deaths for the decennial period 1880–1890, in which time the births exceeded the deaths by 89 or 38·7 per cent., the respective numbers being births 230, deaths 141.

161 The Table given below shows the population of the islands at each census since 1851, with the number of inhabited houses, average
592 number of inhabitants per house, and of acres per head. It thus indicates the period at which the decrease began, and the amount of congestion of the district, both past and present. This congestion, however, must be greater than what the figures show, as under the heading of Inishbofin are grouped some fifty-four other islands or islets, all uninhabited, and varying in size from seventy-four acres downwards. Some of these are utilized for grazing by the people of the two larger islands, but a large number of them are quite useless, being mere barren rocks.

Census.	Population.	Houses.	Inhabitants. per house.	Acres per head.
1851	1047	196	5·34	3·00
1861	1236	239	5·17	2·55
1871	1262	251	5·03	2·50
1881	1166	250	4·67	2·70
1891	997	215	4·64	3·10

161 That the overcrowding is, even now, great, will be seen when it is considered that the density of population per square mile is 202, whilst that of the Aran Islands is 171, of the county of Galway 86, and of Ireland, as a whole, 146.[1]

[1] In the Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland (1846), the population of the islands in 1831 is given as 1462, number of houses not given; population in 1841 as 1612, houses, 285. The decrease afterwards is evidently due to the famine in 1847.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

(E.) *Analysis of the Statistical Tables* :—

141 The variations in type in the inhabitants of the different parts of the district are shown by the following Table, which appears to corroborate the belief entertained by the people that the men of North Inishkea are taller than those of the South Island or of the Mullet. They also show the greater proportion of light hair in the islanders :

	Mullet.	North Inishkea.	South Inishkea.	Portacloy.
Number measured, . . .	35	8	7	12
Cephalic Index, . . .	79·5	78·4	80·1	80·0
Stature, ...	1704 (5 ft. 7 in.)	1727 (5 ft. 8 in.)	1705 (5 ft. 7 in.)	1727 (5 ft. 8 in.)
Proportion to stature—Span, .	104·55	102·45	103·58	105·65
,, ,, Hand, .	11·34	11·04	11·41	11·41
,, ,, Forearm,	15·47	15·60	15·32	15·57
Nigrescence Index,[1] . .	62·30	10·5		77·52

Though the people in all sections of the district are seen to be mesaticephalic (if two units be subtracted to reduce the index to cranial standard), yet in two, South Inishkea and Portacloy, there is an approach to the brachycephalic form. None of the men measured in either place are dolichocephalic, and in most cases the cephalic proportion inclines towards the higher index rather than to the lower.

It would appear also that the North Inishkea men are shorter-limbed than any of their neighbours, as out of the four cases met with in which the span (*grande envergue*) was less than the height, three were from this island.

3. *Vital Statistics* (*General and Economic*) :—

161 (A.) *Population.* — Erris is not now very thickly peopled, the general decrease affecting the population of Ireland during the last 167 fifty years having especially affected this district.

The census returns show a constant and steady decline since 1851, the slight increases which have from time to time occurred in some

[1] Not taken from number measured but from nigrescence cards.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

townlands having only been temporary. That this loss is entirely due to emigration is proved by the returns of births and deaths in the registration district of Binghamstown for the decennial period 1884–1893 in which space of time the births numbered 1260, and the deaths 707, an excess of 553, or 22·7 per cent. The following Table, which refers only to the parish of Kilmore, shows the population of the district at each census since 1851, with the number of inhabited houses, average number of inhabitants per house, and of acres per head.[1]

Census.	Population.	Houses.	Inhabitants per house.	Acres per head.
1851	7379	1106	6·67	3·99
1861	6452	1243	5·19	4·57
1871	5552	1054	5·27	5·31
1881	5327	911	5·85	5·53
1891	4111	694	5·92	7·17

The density of population is thus seen to be about 89 per square mile, but varies with locality, being greatest on S. Inishkea, where it is about 304.

The town of Belmullet, which is not included in the table given above, has fluctuated much since its foundation in 1825. In 1831 its population was 585, and it continued to increase until after 1851, when it had attained its maximum of 935; from that time forth it declined. In 1861 its inhabitants numbered 907; in 1871, 849; in 1881 there was a slight increase, 852; and at the last census, in 1891, the population had fallen to 652.

It was difficult to lay down any exact boundaries to what, for the purposes of this report, is termed the Portacloy district; but the three townlands—Srahataggle, Portacloy, and Curraunboy, from which most of those measured at Portacloy came, have been taken to represent it; in these the population has not undergone the same change as that of Kilmore, the population having risen since 1851, from 248, inhabiting 46 houses, to 299 in 53 houses.

[1] In 1831 the population of Kilmore Erris was 9287.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

The distribution of population, inhabited houses, and outbuildings was as follows in 1891 :—

Locality.	Area.	Population.			Houses.	Outbuildings and Farmsteadings.
		Persons.	Males.	Females.		
	A. R. P.					
The Mullet, .	23,333 1 27	3757	1893	1864	600	532
N. Inishkea, .	464 1 32	126	60	66	21	4
S. Inishkea, .	344 3 19	180	92	88	32	33
23 Islets, . .	350 0 17	48	22	26	10	27
Portacloy, .	7845 1 1	299	148	151	54	29
Totals, . . .	32,338 0 6	410	2215	2195	717	625

(B.) *Acreage and Rental.*—The total area of the district is that of Kilmore, being 29,492 acres, and the three townlands forming the Portacloy district, 7,845 acres.

The total valuation of Kilmore is £4,055 18*s.*, and of Portacloy £163 7*s.*

There is very little commonage in the Mullet, but about Portacloy there is a good deal.

The holdings are not large, averaging about 4½ or 5 acres at a rental of about £3 10*s.* in the Mullet, and about £2 10*s.* in "the mountains." There is considerable variation, however, as there are some farms of good size, but the majority are small.

In 1891 there were, in Kilmore, 210 holdings of between £4 and £10 valuation, 305 of £2 and under £4, and no less than 252 at, or under, £2 valuation.

The land is mostly held now at judicial rentals (the people having early taken advantage of the Land Act of 1881), but sixty years ago the greater part of the land was held in common, and the mode of tenure is thus described by Knight :—"In the whole of the peninsula there are few farms divided . . . the usual system being commonage both in tillage and pasture. In tillage, lots are cast every third year for the number of ridges each person is entitled to after the usual rotation is over. Potatoes the first year, then barley or oats, after which new lots must be cast for new potato ground. The holdings are by sums or collops, which originally meant the number

[961] sixteen are in a similarly formless cluster.

167 Emigration has entered deeply into the fabric of life: in 1841, Inishbofin
161 with Inishark had 1612 people, but ten years later there were only 1047. A rise to 1236 in 1861 and 1262 in 1871 was followed by a drop to 997 in 1891, when there were 215 families of whom one-quarter were said to be "very poor."[18] Steadily the population declined, to 510 in 1936, 406 in 1946, and 341 in 1951, and now less than 300 (including 40 in Inishark). One-quarter of the families were interviewed in 1954; of these only one-third were "normal families" of parents with children. In the school there were only 29 children aged 5–14, whereas the normal figure would be 48. On Inishark there are now only nine able-bodied men, six of whom are needed to man a boat seaworthy in winter, with the result that an epidemic might be disastrous. Permanent emigration to Britain, or, if possible, to America, is favored by the young and adventurous. Even in 1893 seasonal emigration to Britain as harvesters or domestics was declining,[19] though a number of people went to America for several years, saved money, and returned to the islands. A large proportion of the people have spent several years in the United States. In many cases a family has its older relatives in America, its younger ones in Britain.

Conclusion

657 Having reviewed the economic geography of this island certain conclusions emerge. First, the present relative comfort of the population has been made possible only by past and present government assistance bestowed with lib-

[113] [18] Congested Districts Board, Base Line Reports, Clifden district, 1891.
[19] C. R. Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

[p.208(B)]

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

visits ranging in length from one to seven weeks between 1961 and 1966 to complete our project. During the 19 months that we dwelled on the island, most of our research was directed toward documenting the contemporary culture of Inis Beag—its technological, economic, political, social, religious, esthetic, and recreational aspects. We also investigated informal and formal education and the personality traits created by it, reconstructed Inis Beag history of the past century by examining historical materials of many sorts and probing the memories of elderly respondents, and recorded cultural change in process.

The research techniques that we employed are standard ethnographic ones: the guided and open-ended interview, external and participant observation, collection of life histories, photography, and phonography. Two departures from methodological orthodoxy were our use, as projective devices, of literary works and a sixty-two-verse ballad that I composed. A dozen islanders of both sexes and three age groups read at our request three books portraying Inis Beag culture, and we recorded and analyzed their varied responses. My ballad, now embedded in the island folklore tradition, is based on a shipwreck and rescue off Inis Beag that we witnessed, and a series of incidents which ensued during the following months. Alterations made by local singers after it was completed and the reactions to it by the islanders gave us insights into Inis Beag culture and personality which would have been difficult to obtain under other circumstances of fieldwork. I must add that the ballad was a product of exuberant cultural involvement and the satisfactions of "creative endeavor." Its research implications were unanticipated.

The Inis Beag islanders qualify as folk people in almost every respect, according to anthropological definition (Lewis 1960:1): the population has maintained its stability for at least two hundred years, there is a strong bond between the peasants and their land, and agriculture provides them with the major source of their livelihood; production is mainly for subsistence and is carried on with a simple technology which includes as primary implements the digging stick, spade, and scythe; the island folk participate in a money economy, but barter still persists; a low standard of living prevails, and the birth rate is high; the family is of central importance, and marriage figures prominently as a provision of economic welfare; the island is integrated into the county and national governments and is subject to their laws; the people long have been exposed to urban influences, have borrowed cultural elements from other rural areas on the mainland, and have integrated them into a relatively stable system; and, finally, the experience of living under foreign rule for over three centuries has created in the islanders an attitude of dependence and, at the same time, one of hostility toward the government which continues to this day. The only conditions in Inis Beag which run counter to those in most other peasant groups are low death and illiteracy rates. The Irish shun the term peasant as applied to individuals or communities, for the same reason that elitists in developing countries eschew the term primitive as applied to traditional cultural forms found in societies incorporated into newly formed states. The causes of this attitude must be examined next.

During the past hundred years, Ireland has experienced a vigorous nativistic movement—provoked by seven centuries of English domination, linked with nationalism as the Irish sought to assert their independence, focused on the

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

175 [70] [698] The castle and watch tower still dominate the Inis Beag skyline, and the latter serves as a landmark for fishermen posting their nets. Another landmark, at the southeast tip of the island, is a 110-feet-high lighthouse built during the 1850s.

175 173 731 244 Written sources and local traditions disagree as to the effects of the great famine on Inis Beag. Some observers claim that the potato blight completely destroyed island crops, and the folk were forced to depend on secondary agricultural commodities, livestock, fish, and limpets in order to survive; conversely, others maintain that the blight did not penetrate the island until much later. According to my Inis Beag respondents, the blight did contaminate some gardens, but enough [437] were spared so that the islanders were not greatly inconvenienced. In fact, potatoes [161] were exported by some farmers to help feed starving mainlanders. Between 1841 and 1851, the population of Inis Beag increased by 62 persons, at a time when [167] most other Irish communities had dwindling populations. The first record of substantial emigration from the island, mostly to the United States, was in 1822.

Contemporary Setting

131 Inis Beag has a northeast to southwest topographical axis, at right angles to its geological axis, and is a mile and three-quarters in length and a quarter of a [161] mile less in width. A population of 350 persons inhabits four villages, and the [361] island comprises 1440 acres. When giving directions informally, the folk refer to [823] the beach side as the north side and the back of the island bordering the Atlantic as the south side; then, the sound separating Inis Beag from Inis Thiar becomes the west side, and the sound between Inis Beag and the mainland the east side. I will follow this practice when describing various geographical and other features 133 in this chapter. Between the mainland and Inis Beag, a reef extending from the island far out into the east sound is a menace to shipping; it was on this reef within 200 yards of the shore that the freighter ran aground in 1960.

133 311 A large beach and a contiguous stretch of common land, which together make up over 200 of the island's 1440 acres, dominate the north side of Inis Beag. The beach is known as the "strand," following English usage, and lies west and north of the common land, about midway between the sounds (see Figs. 4, 9, and 10). It is thought that several hundred years ago arable land existed where the common land does today, and the strand was very narrow; but gradually sand accumulated, widening the beach and burying more and more farm land as it crept eastward. If one examines the Ordnance Survey Maps of 1841 and 1902, the slow encroachment of the sand can be noted. The common land was about half its present size in 1841, and 60 years later almost 70 acres of cultivable soil had been engulfed. The tops of fences projecting above the surface at the present time attest to the shifting of the sand, as does the buried church of the patron saint, and sand now threatens fertile plots on the east side of the island.

[361] There are six major and several minor terraces in Inis Beag, of which the lower two underlie the strand, the common land, and two of the four villages. The lower terraces are broad and the upper ones narrow and precipitous, while weather-

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

5

The Future of the Island

Emigration

MANY ELDERS IN INIS BEAG fear that the island and its neighbors will go the way of the Blasket Islands of Co. Kerry, whose remaining inhabitants were removed by the government because their support had become an economic liability. With only slight fluctuations, the population of Inis Beag has been diminishing since it reached its zenith of 532 persons in 1861. Below are population figures since 1821—when the first census was compiled—until the present time:

1821	421
1841	456
1861	532
1881	497
1901	483
1926	409
1936	445
1946	447
1956	376
1960	350

The upsurge in population after 1926 reflects the depression in the United States and the Second World War, when emigrants returned home to escape unemployment and conscription, while the downsurge after 1946 reflects the shift of emigration from America to England. Frequently discussed by elders is the steady increase in emigration during the past 15 years, the decreasing age of emigrants, and the presence within the past decade—for the first time in three centuries—of aged parents all of whose children have emigrated, and of land which is idle or rented out by emigrants who probably never will return to Inis Beag. Jokes concerning the building of a hotel by the Germans or a missile site by the Americans in the island to stimulate the economy, as well as serious suggestions that the

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

the major source of their livelihood; production is mainly for subsistence and is carried on with a simple technology, using the digging stick, spade, and scythe as primary implements; the island folk participate in a money economy, but barter still persists; a low standard of living prevails, and the birth rate is high; the family is of central importance, and marriage figures prominently as a provision of economic welfare; the island is integrated into the county and national governments and is subject to their laws; the people have long been exposed to urban influences and have borrowed cultural forms from other rural areas on the mainland, integrating them into a relatively stable system; and, finally, the experience of living under English rule for centuries has created in the islanders an attitude of dependence on—yet hostility toward—government which continues to this day. The only conditions in Inis Beag which run counter to those found in most other peasant communities are low death and illiteracy rates and bilateral, rather than unilineal, descent (although inheritance is patrilineal).

Inis Beag culture also characterizes people of nearby islands, and the traditions of the several together might be regarded as forming a subculture of the total Irish system. Many island customs are shared with rural peasants on the mainland (where numerous regional subcultures exist), and some are part of a broader European matrix. The island has experienced considerable cultural change since the establishment of the Congested Districts Board (forerunner of the Gaeltacht) in 1891 and the growth of tourism in this century. But conditions there still approximate those which must have prevailed two generations ago, and earlier, throughout this region of peasant Ireland.

Inis Beag has a population of approximately 350 persons living in seventy-one "cottages" distributed among four settlements, called "villages." Bordering a "strand" and a large tract of common land on the northeastern side of the island are a series of limestone terraces, separated by water-bearing shales and faced by small cliffs, on which the villages are situated. Most of the arable land is found on this side, where the shales have been broken down by weathering and alien soils deposited by wind and by ice of the Weichsel glacier. Over many generations, the islanders have deepened these soils and created new soils on rock surfaces by adding seaweed, sand, and human manure. On the southwestern side of Inis Beag, known as the "back of the island," limestone pavements slope rather evenly, almost as the gentle dip of the strata, from the crest of the highest terrace to the sea a mile away. The bared surfaces are intersected in all directions by crevices,

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

tent; they have depended on a limited sample of respondents; and most of their queries have been guided by Sean O Suilleabhain's *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*, which does not contain numerous categories of significance to anthropologists.

My wife and I devoted most of our research to documenting the contemporary culture of Inis Beag: its economic, political, social, religious, esthetic, and recreational aspects. We also described formal and informal education and the personality traits formed by it, reconstructed Inis Beag history of the past century by examining historical materials of many types and probing the memories of aged island respondents, and recorded cultural change in process over an eight-year period. The standard ethnographic research techniques that we employed include guided and open-ended interviews, external and participant observation, collection of life histories, cross-checking, photography, and phonography. The sample for much of our data was the total universe of 350 inhabitants.

It is extremely difficult to obtain information in Inis Beag about such matters as amounts and sources of income, disputes, pagan religious retentions and reinterpretations, and sex. This brief list might be increased by at least threefold and gives rise to a consideration of the problems associated with obtaining reliable data from the Irish in general and the islanders in particular. Honor Tracy, in the first chapter (aptly entitled "Forebodings") of her book, *Mind You I've Said Nothing*, humorously presents one of the shortest, yet most discerning analyses of Irish national character yet written by a novelist and predicts the various reactions that her volume will evoke in Irish readers.[4] She concludes with the following remarks about the difficulties surrounding fact finding in Ireland:

> This question of fact was another of the spectres hovering in my path. In every book there should be a fact here and there or the writer is charged with aimless frivolity. But facts in Ireland are very peculiar things. They are rarely allowed to spoil the sweep and flow of conversation: the crabbing

[4] These reactions appear to be institutionalized, as my writings and conversational remarks have also evoked them. Two additional responses that I have encountered are: my conclusions are invalidated because I failed to consult certain "source materials" written in Gaelic, and my inferior writing style precludes serious consideration of my findings. I take pains to explain, usually in vain, the many methods of fieldwork utilized by ethnographers to Irish persons who are critical of my data and who invariably use the phrase, "You can't trust what an Irishman tells you." On a rare occasion, one listener to my lengthy explanation said, "Ah, you're cuter than we are"—a compliment indeed!

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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appears, however, that this argument is usually used as a rationalization for late marriage, when other causal factors are, in reality, responsible—certainly when "considering" covers two or more decades!

The population of Inis Beag has dropped from a high of 532 persons in 1861 (up 76 from the prefamine census a decade earlier) to 497 in 1881, 483 in 1901, 409 in 1926, 376 in 1956, and 350 when my wife and I were there two years later. Today, there is grave concern over the future of the island, and some folk hold that within another generation or two Inis Beag will have gone the way of the Blasket Islands. Although my wife and I isolated almost two dozen causes for the phenomena of late marriage and celibacy, over thirty interrelated causes pertain to emigration (many of those at work in the marital sphere also stimulate emigration). Once again, I will address only the principal causes and stress the role of sexual repression, dealing first with internal factors and then external ones promoting emigration.

Among internal causes, the previously considered inheritance pattern, parents who want to maintain the family status quo for various reasons, and the girls' and young women's increasing dissatisfaction with their lot figure as prominently in the emigration picture as the marital. Some Inis Beag men claim that the reason male youths are leaving the island is economic depression, caused by the collapse of kelp-making and the fishing industry. But this cause is untenable when one examines the increase in government subsidies, remittances from relatives abroad, and taxation and land rental policies; these have far more than made up for the loss of previous revenue. Real income has increased substantially, despite recent inflation, and young men are very much aware of this fact. Just as late marriage has become institutionalized over the past century, so has emigration since the first large-scale migration of islanders in 1822. Emigration is a way of life, which will stimulate some folk to leave in spite of other conditions which might lead an observer to advise their remaining.

By far the most important reason for Inis Beag's long dwindling population is the total cultural impact of sexual puritanism and the secular "excesses" of the clergy. Blanshard writes, "When all the reasons for a flight from Ireland have been mentioned, there still remains a suspicion that Irish young people are leaving their nation largely because it is a poor place in which to be happy and free. Have the priests created a civilization in which the chief values of youth and love are subordinate to Catholic discipline?" (Blanshard 1954: 154). What "remains a suspicion" to Blanshard is fully confirmed by a wealth of data from Inis